
REVIEW ESSAY: ISLAM IN THE INDONESIA TRANSITION

Luthfi Assyaukanie. *Islam and the Secular State in Indonesia*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009. 262 pp.

Robin Bush. *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia*. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009. 256 pp.

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More than a dozen years after its unsteady beginning, Indonesia's post-Soeharto transition continues to attract global attention, not least because of the questions it raises concerning the role of Islam in democratic polities. International interest in the Indonesian example is not surprising. The country's transition occurred against the backdrop of a decade of debate in Western media and policy circles over the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The Algerian civil war of the early 1990s, the rise of al-Qa'ida in the 1990s, Muslim insurgencies from Chechnya to Mindanao, and, not least of all, second thoughts in secularist Europe about its Muslim citizens kept the question of Islam and democracy in the air. For Indonesianists, the issue was complicated by the fact that, having begun brightly, the transition was soon afflicted by a plague of gangsterism and communal violence. In the early 2000s, optimistic talk of "Muslim democracy" and "civil Islam" struck Western skeptics as yet another example of bleeding-heart self-delusion.

Yet here is Indonesia more than a decade later, its newspapers still outspoken, its economy humming despite the global financial meltdown, and its elections moderate in both conduct and outcome. As Ian Wilson has demonstrated, even the political gangsterism of the early transition period has declined.¹ Yes, corruption and money politics remain pervasive, and human-rights abuses continue in Papua and several other provinces. But in light of the country's authoritarian history, what the transition has achieved is nothing less than remarkable. This is what draws observers back to the

¹ See Ian Wilson, "The Rise and Fall of Political Gangsters in Indonesia," in *Problems of Democratisation in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions, and Society*, ed. Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner (Singapore: Indonesia Update Series, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010), pp. 199–218.

question, What role have Islam and Muslims played in this extraordinary transformation?

It is this big question, as well as a host of smaller ones, that also underlies these two recent books on Muslim politics in contemporary Indonesia. Both revisit the role of Muslim leaders and organizations in the events of the late-Soeharto and early *Reformasi* period. The books differ in breadth, methodology, and theoretical orientation. Yet both provide original and welcome insights into the achievements and shortcomings of Indonesian Muslim politics.

Islam and the Secular State in Indonesia

Luthfi Assyauckanie's *Islam and the Secular State in Indonesia* is the more far-ranging of the two books. Deputy director of the Freedom Institute and a senior lecturer at the Paramadina University in Jakarta, Assyauckanie was a founding member of Indonesia's Jaringan Indonesia Liberal (JIL, Liberal Islam Network), a loosely organized network of young intellectuals set up in March 2001 and committed to the promotion of a self-consciously liberal Islam. In its early years, Assyauckanie managed JIL's internet presence and earned a well-deserved reputation for his efforts to nudge on-line discussions toward matters of intellectual substance. A similar spirit of deep and often iconoclastic intellectualism pervades this book, which is based on a prize-winning dissertation submitted in 2007 to the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Assyauckanie begins his study with the observation that in recent years books on Islam have devoted most of their attention to the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism. "Books on Indonesian Islam," he adds, not without a little exaggeration, "are no exception" (Assyauckanie, p. ix). Yet, he argues, over the past fifty years the most important news on Indonesian Islam is not radicalism, but the fact that Muslim politics in this country has "made progress toward a more pluralist and democratic system of polity" (Assyauckanie, p. ix). The fact that Indonesian Muslim politics is "increasingly pragmatic," he argues, is amply demonstrated in Islamist parties' inability to win even 20 percent of the national vote in 1999 and 2004 (a pattern confirmed, as Rizal Sukma has recently observed,² in 2009). The question this raises, Assyauckanie asserts, is how to explain the rise of moderation and the "defeat of Islamic political parties?" (Assyauckanie, p. 223).

Some have attempted to explain the moderation of Muslim electoral politics as a product of the Soeharto regime's repressive programs in education, politics, and the economy. But more important, Assyauckanie argues, has been "a process of 'secularization from within'" (Assyauckanie, p. 3) carried out by "a new generation of *santri* Muslims" better educated than their elders, and skeptical of the old Islamist claims about the need for Islamic parties, an Islamic state, and the implementation of *shari'a* law (Assyauckanie, p. x). The political-cultural streams known in Indonesia as *aliran* have changed, and one index of the change is that, "The political imagination of *santri* Muslims is no longer homogeneous" (Assyauckanie, p. 227). Not only are the old-guard Islamists of yesteryear in decline, but—rephrasing Harry J. Benda's famous

² Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia's 2009 Elections: Defective System, Resilient Democracy," in *Problems of Democratisation*, pp. 53–74.

thesis—"The history of Indonesia is the expansion of liberal and progressive *santri* civilization" (Assyaukanie, p. 231).

As this last statement hints, Assyaukanie's summary comments at times are marked by a hyperbolic rhetorical flourish, not least when it comes to assessing the strength of secularist varieties of liberal Islam in Indonesia. Though the book's introduction and conclusion have a few pronouncements of this sort, the book's core chapters are original, careful, and impressively far-ranging. On these grounds alone this stands as a must-read book for all who work on Muslim politics in Indonesia.

Assyaukanie proposes to assess the causes of the "failure" of Islamism and the triumph of moderation through a reanalysis of "three generations of Muslim intellectuals since independence" (Assyaukanie, p. 1). "Islamic arguments that are developed in intellectual forums, publications, and academic circles," he argues (making a point that resonates with Juergen Habermas and Michael Warner's remarks on the public sphere, although neither is mentioned here), "play a significant role" (Assyaukanie, p. 1) in Muslim political life. More specifically, from the 1950s to today, three core models of Muslim politics have competed for *santri* sympathies. They are the Islamic Democratic State (IDS), the Religious Democratic State (RDS), and the Liberal Democratic State (LDS). Islamists like the Jemaah Islamiyah or the Darul Islam, who reject democracy as incompatible with Islam, are not included in the book's discussion because, Assyaukanie argues, they occupy only a marginal space in Muslim Indonesia's political imaginary.

Associated most directly with Masyumi intellectuals like Hamka, Mohammad Natsir, and Zainal Abidin Ahmad, the IDS model accepts that democracy is compatible with Islam, even agreeing that it is the "best possible system of polity" (Assyaukanie, p. 227). However, Assyaukanie asserts, the IDS school conceptualizes democracy in majoritarian terms. IDS-ers ignore modern democratic theory's complementary emphasis on not just majority rule, but civil liberties and legal protections for all, including religious minorities. In line with their majoritarian tastes, IDS-ers believe that positions of state leadership should be reserved for Muslims. They also insist that the state has the obligation to implement Islamic law for Muslim citizens, even where its provisions as conventionally understood discriminate against religious minorities, women, and Muslims who profess a non-majority variety of Islam. Although dominant in *santri* circles in the 1950s, IDS influence declined in the late 1950s as a result of setbacks in national elections, disputes between NU traditionalists and Masyumi modernists, state persecution, and, in the New Order period, the rise of a new generation of Muslim thinkers.

The Religious Democratic State model differs from that of the IDS in accepting that Indonesia is culturally pluralist, and that, rather than Islam, the ideological basis of the Indonesian state must be some multi-confessional charter like the Pancasila. The Soeharto regime promoted a conservative version of the RDS, but eventually a less coercive variety was embraced by the majority of Indonesian Muslims.

One among the many highlights of this book and the author's category of the Religious Democratic State is that it allows Assyaukanie to point out that the Pancasila-based RDS model is *not* just another variety of secularist politics, but rather a hybrid located between secular and religious democracy. The model is distinguished by the

fact that it “considers religion crucial in political and governmental life” even as it rejects the idea of the Islamic state (Assyaukanie, p. 229). The idea that in Muslim-majority societies there are models of religion and state more varied than the tired duality of “secularism” and “Islamism” has long been acknowledged in the sociology of religion, Middle Eastern studies, and the anthropology of Indonesian Islam.³ Though not entirely original, Assyaukanie’s argument is nonetheless a helpful reminder that the recognition of this variety is not yet general in Indonesian studies, where the Pancasila continues to be misidentified as “secularist.”

In chapter 4, one of the book’s most powerful, Assyaukanie shows that in the 1970s and 1980s the RDS model was embraced by a new generation of *santri* thinkers, including Amien Rais, Syafii Maarif, and Dawam Rahardjo. Those scholars invoked the model when justifying their qualified support for some of Soeharto’s modernization ideals, while also rejecting secularist liberalism’s high wall of separation between religion and state. The rejection of such a high wall has been used by proponents of the RDS model to justify, among other things, the Department of Religion, the 1974 marriage law, the 1989 law on Islamic courts, and Law No. 20/2003, the so-called Sisdiknas legislation, which mandates religious education in schools. These arrangements countenance extensive state intervention in religious affairs and religious influence on civil society. In Assyaukanie’s eyes, all thereby violate the separation of religion and state required if a polity is to be genuinely democratic.

It is this conviction—that pluralist democracy requires a high wall between religion and state—that lies at the heart of Assyaukanie’s third model, the Liberal Democratic State, the model to which Assyaukanie subscribes. Interestingly, when he turns to identify Western political philosophers who have helped shape the LDS model, he cites not liberals like John Rawls, social democrats like Juergen Habermas, or communitarian liberals like Charles Taylor, but the market libertarian Robert Nozick. “The core aim of political liberalism,” Assyaukanie writes, using a strikingly libertarian phrasing, “is to give people their freedom and liberty. One of the ways to fulfill this freedom is by limiting the state’s control” (Assyaukanie, p. 141). In these and other comments, Assyaukanie signals that his own understanding of liberalism owes as much or more to small-state-libertarianism as to social democracy, Atlantic liberalism, or contemporary Muslim democracy.

It is here, as Assyaukanie is making his case for liberalism and secular democracy, that the greatest tensions emerge in his narrative. On one hand, he wants to argue that, even if not yet dominant, Muslim support for LDS-style liberalism has grown steadily in the post-Soeharto period. As he surveys the social landscape, those he identifies as supporters of the LDS model include not only such familiar figures as Nurcholish

³ The idea that modern polities do not break down neatly into opposed “secular” and “religious” camps, but, in fact, include a variety of complex hybrids, is recognized well beyond the study of Islamic societies. The issue has long been recognized in the sociology of religion; the point has recently caught the attention of political scientists working on questions of religion and state. For a classical statement of the “multiple secularities” view, see David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005). For recent statements in a global context, see Jonathan Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Michael Warner, Jonathan van Antwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). For studies of the point in Muslim-majority societies, see Gabriele Marranci, ed., *Muslim Societies and the Challenge of Secularization: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (London: Springer, 2010).

Madjid and Djohan Effendi, but Masdar F. Masudi, Abdurrahman Wahid, and a large proportion of students and faculty from the State Islamic University system (IAIN/UIN, Institut Agama Islam Negeri/Universitas Islam Negeri; see Assyauckanie, p. 144). In the casual usage common in Indonesia, these individuals or groups can be called "liberal." But the categorization runs into problems if, like Assyauckanie, one tries to argue that those who are liberal on, say, matters of religious tolerance and constitutionalism, are also liberal in the LDS sense of establishing a high wall of separation between religion and state. Yet this is Assyauckanie's claim. "Based on the conviction that secularization or the separation of religion and the state is possible in Islam, the exponents of Model 3 [LDS] believe that the state that is ruled free of religious interference is better than the state in which religion interferes" (Assyauckanie, p. 151). The claim that the majority of "liberal" Muslims (in the simple, non-libertarian sense of the term) subscribe to this radically privatized vision of religion is, I believe, highly questionable.

Although thinkers like Masdar Mas'udi and Nurcholish Madjid have written articles in which they object to state interference in *some* religious matters, they have also made clear that they would be grateful for *more* involvement in others. As Masudi told me on several occasions in the 1990s, he thought the Soeharto-sponsored Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI) was an unwelcome example of state meddling in religious affairs. But Mas'udi was keen on the idea that the state might provide financial and logistical assistance to progressive Muslim scholars interested in turning their Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) into engines of grassroots development. In a conversation in mid-August 1999, Madjid told me that he thought the curriculum used for religious education in state elementary schools needed to be improved to place greater emphasis on the importance of religious tolerance. But he also emphasized that he did *not* feel that the state should be less involved in religious education, but more active in the promotion of democracy-friendly religious values.

One suspects that Assyauckanie may have been tempted to make the claim that he does about the growing popularity of, not only pluralist democracy, but secularist separationism because, like some Western policy makers these days, he believes that without such a high wall democracy cannot take root. Assyauckanie makes just this claim when he writes that, in Western and other democracies, "the common platform that ties members of communities is secularization or the separation of religion and the state, and not the unification of religion and the state" (Assyauckanie, p. 130). Moreover, he adds, the separation entails not only the formal severance of ties between religious and state authorities, but the transformation of religion into a purely *private* matter.

The history of real-and-existing democracy in the modern West offers little evidence to support this claim. Authors as varied as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, José Casanova, Ahmet T. Kuru, David Martin, and Charles Taylor⁴ have demonstrated that

⁴ See Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ahmet T. Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

a high wall of separation between religion and state was *not* the norm in Western Europe during the democratic transitions of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most Western European countries countenanced extensive collaboration between church and state; indeed, many still today have established churches and special financial arrangements to support churches and religious schooling.⁵ In a recent study of the separation of religion and state in 152 countries, the political scientist Jonathan Fox has shown that a full separation of religion and state (defined as no state support for religion and no state restrictions on religion) is found *no where in the world* except the United States. A full separation of religion and states, Fox writes, "is far from the norm; rather, it is a rare exception to the more general rule that governments involve themselves in religious issues."⁶

Inasmuch as high-wall separation is so rare, we can with confidence conclude that it is not a necessary ingredient for pluralist democracy. The modern history of democracy shows that religion's cloistering and privatization are not required to make democracy work. The key lies instead in public religion's refiguration so that its values and organizations work with, rather than against, the forces of pluralist democracy.

Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia

Robin Bush's book on *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia* takes a more praxiological approach to Muslims and democracy in Indonesia than does Assaukanie, but her account is no less powerful. Bush is the Asia Foundation's Country Representative in Indonesia, and since 1998 she has been involved in the foundation's programs on Islam and civil society. This book is a substantial revision of a dissertation that she prepared in political science at the University of Washington (Seattle, WA), under the supervision of the late Daniel S. "Dan" Lev.

Bush begins her study by noting that the heightening of global tensions with regard to Islam and politics has brought Indonesia into the limelight "as an example of a nation where democracy and Islam successfully cohabitate" (Bush, p. 1). This achievement has drawn attention to the conditions that have made such a cohabitation possible. Like Assaukanie, Bush concludes that one key has been the moderating influence of the country's two large mass-based Muslim organizations, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. With their 75 million followers, these organizations provide a "remarkable channel for constructive civic engagement" (Bush, p. 2). However, their democracy-enhancing qualities have at times been compromised by their parent organizations' "highly politicized nature" (Bush, p. 2). One of the developments that best illustrates this tension, and which sits at the center of Bush's narrative, was NU's 1984 celebrated "Return to the Guidelines of 1926" (*Kembali ke*

⁵ See S. Moensma and C. Soper, *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); and Alfred Stepan, "The World's Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the 'Twin Tolerations,'" in *Arguing Comparative Politics*, ed. Alfred Stepan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 213–53.

⁶ Jonathan Fox, "World Separation of Religion and State into the 21st Century," *Comparative Political Studies* 39,2 (2006): 559.

Khittah 1926), through which the NU announced its withdrawal from formal party politics and its return to religious and civil-society affairs.

Bush demonstrates that NU's ostensible withdrawal from politics actually facilitated not depoliticization, but new and competing streams of NU politics. On one hand, the policy shift facilitated cooperative ties between the regime and NU-affiliated boarding schools, ties that had withered when NU was more forcefully oppositional. The policy shift also allowed Abdurrahman Wahid, longtime president of NU, to reposition himself vis-à-vis the regime, accepting an appointment as a Golkar representative in the People's Consultative Assembly. The "Guidelines of 1926" decision also gave NU room to develop a nascent civil-society movement, one that, in the twilight years of the New Order, played an increasingly important role in rallying Muslims to democratic ideals. The latter chapters of this book focus on just what happened to each of those intra-NU political streams during the Wahid presidency, when Wahid and others in the NU leadership were drawn back into politics, raising questions about the depth of the leadership's democratic commitments.

Whereas Assyaukanie places special emphasis on the role of new Muslim intellectuals and the public sphere, Bush's more praxiological approach hones in on the ways in which religiously inspired actors and ideas undergo unexpected changes as they grapple with practical political challenges. At the center of her theoretical approach is the question of Islam and civil society. She begins by dismissing the "empirically inaccurate yet deeply ingrained" (Bush, p. 3) notion that religion and politics were always separate in the West. She also emphasizes that "democracy is a multivalent and varied political system" and there is "not just one 'right way'" to it (Bush, p. 6). While distancing herself from the neo-Tocquevillian claim that civil-society organizations always inculcate democratic habits of the heart, she argues that a certain type of civil-society process can, indeed, enhance the chances for democracy in Muslim societies. That process involves (1) local intellectuals drawing on their own experience and discourses to affirm principles of autonomy, mutuality, and voluntarism, (2) the generalization of these values to a broader public sphere, and the (3) acknowledgement and scaling up of these values and practices by a variety of institutions, including the state (Bush, pp. 7–8). Bush uses this theoretical optic to assess Nahdlatul Ulama's contribution to Indonesia's democratization from the 1980s to the early 2000s.

In the course of presenting her arguments, Bush also revisits the broad sweep of Muslim political history. Chapter 2 provides a brief history of the coming of Islam to Indonesia, and the origins of the NU. Among the many interesting points she raises in this chapter is that, after breaking with Masyumi modernists in 1952, NU was more insistent than the modernists on having the state implement *shari'a* (Bush, p. 50). However, as the rivalry between the two organizations intensified after 1955, NU distinguished itself from Masyumi by presenting itself as the party of tolerance, even as it pursued its campaign for state-enforced *shari'a*.

Chapter 3 examines the social and political background to 1984's Guidelines '26 decision. Bush shows that the decision to withdraw from formal politics was the result of several factors, including the repressive squeeze of the Soeharto regime, the growing conviction in *ulama* circles that the Jakarta-based executive had usurped control of the organization, and the emergence of a third generation of NU leaders, including Wahid

and his associates. Although the third-generation group had hoped that the Guidelines '26 decision would usher in a progressive rethinking of such cornerstones of Islamic life as worship (*ibadat*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the resolution as finally passed was far less ambitious. Indeed, it affirmed *ulama* authority and "a more traditional or conservative religious orientation" (Bush, p. 78).

Notwithstanding the return to Guidelines '26, "there was no lessening of political activity after NU's decision to 'withdraw from politics'" (Bush, p. 80). Government funds flowed once again to *pesantren*, and Abdurrahman Wahid began his spectacular ascent into national politics. Although the Guidelines '26 decision did not remove NU from politics, it did pave the way for the establishment of a host of NU-linked civil-society organizations, many of which went on to become critical of the government. As ICMI gained influence in the early 1990s, Wahid borrowed elements of the civil-society discourse. But he used it, not to attack Soeharto, but to castigate the modernist Muslims predominant in the organization for "exploiting Islamic symbols and language for political gain" (Bush, p. 92). The fact that Wahid's use of the discourse had instrumental aims, Bush observes, did not diminish the fact that the civil-society activists now had a platform to promote their community-based vision of transformative Islam. The movement created by NU's young civil-society activists "was able to take on a life of its own and expand far beyond Wahid's own more immediate political purposes" (Bush, p. 103).

Chapter 4 assesses developments in NU in the final months of the Soeharto regime and the early years of *Reformasi*. Bush shows that, with the establishment of the National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB), fifteen years of efforts to keep NU out of formal politics came to an end. Notwithstanding the support provided by modernist Muslims for Wahid's election to the presidency in October 1999, relations between the two communities quickly deteriorated. Although some in NU's autonomous bodies, including the Women's (Muslimat NU) and Younger Women's (Fatayat NU) Organization, were unenthusiastic about the return to party politics, the critics were soon silenced (Bush, p. 123).

Bush's portrait of the Wahid presidency is polite but highly critical. Although Wahid's presidency got off to a good start with his appeals for pluralism and tolerance, his efforts to lift the ban on communism and establish trade relations with Israel showed a woeful misperception of his own influence. He embarrassed friends and humiliated allies like Megawati. Worse yet, "when his hold on power was threatened, Wahid not only resorted to undemocratic measures but invoked religious symbolism and teachings to protect his own political position" (Bush, p. 175). The nongovernmental organizations that rallied to support the embattled president during his final days seemed "strangely out of touch with political reality," overlooking "the many violations of reform ideals he [Wahid] had been responsible for during his 21 months in office" (Bush, p. 139).

The book's last substantive chapter, Chapter 5, traces developments within NU during and just after the Wahid interregnum. At the NU National Congress conference in Lirboyo in November 1999, NU women pressed unsuccessfully for more female representation on NU's executive board, and for revisions to *fiqh* to remove gender bias. But the Muktamar executive had less innovative goals in mind. The board invoked *shari'a* principles to ban NU participation in inter-religious prayer meetings—

events that Wahid had regularly attended before becoming president (Bush, p. 166). Although NU's women's and civil-society wings pressed on, these developments revealed "a fairly dramatic shift away from the religiously tolerant, nationally oriented, and pluralist discourse promoted by Wahid and his followers over the previous decade and one-half" (Bush, p. 167).

Bush suggests, I think correctly, that NU's more conservative tack reflected two realities. First, "the discourse of civil society ... was an elite discourse, confined largely to the urban-based younger generations of intellectuals and activists" (Bush, p. 167). Second, she observes that the "process of greater democratization within NU" gave fuller representation to the interests of low- and mid-level *ulama*, most of whom had never agreed with Wahid's ideas on revitalizing traditionalist Islam (*ibid.*).

Faced with this checkered pattern of achievements, Bush's conclusions with regard to Muslim culture and politics are more restrained than those of Assyaukanie. In NU, she writes, "the efforts to achieve a renewal of religious thinking have ... had a mixed success" (Bush, p. 189). On the positive side, most of the NU-linked civil-society organizations established under Wahid's leadership have survived, and they continue to promote pluralist values. But the NU executive has quietly blocked efforts to move boldly reformist approaches to pluralism, gender, and governance to the heart of the organization's mission. Western governments' efforts to cultivate a constituency of "moderate Muslims" in the aftermath of the 2001 September 11th attacks have only made things worse. The heavy-handedness of the intervention caused Muslims of diverse political persuasions to close ranks rather than press forward with intellectual reforms.

Notwithstanding this checkered pattern of progress, these two books remind us of how much has been achieved since Soeharto's departure. Despite the threat of terrorist violence, the likelihood of radical Islamist adventurism upending the entire political system now seems remote. Efforts to implement conservative varieties of *shari'a*-inspired legislation in the provinces have slowed or stopped. Three rounds of national elections have confirmed the appeal of get-the-job-done centrists. Despite threats from hardline conservatives, the State Islamic University System continues to implement a curriculum that is among the most cosmopolitan in the entire Muslim world.

Under the retrospective light of these two fine books, however, one can also appreciate why more theologically ambitious efforts to promote progressive cultural reforms have sometimes hit a wall. In the well-controlled political world of the early 1990s, the avant garde of Indonesia's Muslim democrats was intent on promoting public ethical reforms that rank as among the boldest in the Muslim world. The society in which the Muslim democrats were doing so, however, was not nearly so forward looking. The post-Soeharto opening of politics and the public sphere, then, has allowed more centrist and conservative Muslim voices to be heard. More distressingly, the combination of an open political environment and a lack of government will with regard to minority religious rights has provided an environment in which militia groups have been able to harass non-Muslims and Muslim liberals. These activities have contributed to an at-least relative increase in religious intolerance, not least of all, as a recent ICG report observes, "where hard-line Islamists and Christian evangelicals

compete for the same ground.”⁷ At the same time, however, the political opening has demonstrated the broader Muslim public’s lack of interest in religious extremism. Meanwhile, the results of national elections have been consistently pragmatic. Imperfect as it is, this is democracy, Indonesian style. And, yes, as Assyauckanie and Bush show so well, the Muslim community in all its diversity has been central to it all.

⁷ See International Crisis Group, “Indonesia: ‘Christianisation’ and Intolerance,” Asia Briefing No. 114, November 24, 2010.